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Virginia wins national award for child support enforcement

Recognition given for innovation using cell phone records to locate delinquent parents

Richmond, Va. – The Virginia Department of Social Services' (VDSS) Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) is setting an example of how to innovatively and creatively collect past due child support payments – and the nation is noticing. The Council of State Governments (CSG) recently presented DCSE with the Innovation Award at its Southern Legislative Conference in Williamsburg, Va. DCSE was recognized for its Cell Phone Initiative to locate parents who are delinquent in paying child support.

The initiative is working. DCSE is currently looking for 268,000 delinquent non-custodial parents owing a total of \$2.4 billion in current and past due support payments to 484,000 of Virginia's children. Through this initiative, DCSE has obtained more than 52,000 active cell phone numbers against which they will match billing addresses. In fiscal year 2007, more than \$608 million was successfully collected, an increase of nearly four percent from the previous fiscal year.

Governor Timothy M. Kaine praised the success of the program. "Virginia was the first state to initiate administrative subpoenas to cell phone companies requesting addresses and phone numbers for those owing child support. The Commonwealth is now working with other states to automate the matching of names with cell phone company databases," Governor Kaine said.

In 2005, DCSE began working with the Attorney General's office to introduce a groundbreaking method of tracking hard to locate offenders and began issuing subpoenas to seven of the largest cell phone providers. In all of these cases, other traditional methods to locate the non-custodial parents, such as working with financial institutions and employers, had been exhausted. To compound the problem, most of these delinquent parents frequently changed jobs and addresses.

"This recognition from CSG focuses well-deserved attention on the commitment DCSE workers make to the children of Virginia each day. Even more special is that the announcement coincides

with Child Support Enforcement Month, which is recognized in August,” said VDSS Commissioner Anthony Conyers Jr.

CSG is a national organization that services the executive, judicial and legislative branches of state governments through leadership education, research and information services. The annual Innovation Award recognizes programs and initiatives that provide insight into major policy trends for states, commonwealths and territories on a national and regional basis. DCSE was one of 10 programs CSG named as a regional finalist out of 113 nominations and one of only two final award winners. North Carolina was also named an innovation winner. Virginia and North Carolina will both be presented national awards for their governing efforts in Oklahoma City, Okla. in November.

The VDSS Home Office is located in Richmond and administers social services programs, consistent with federal and state law and policy of the State Board of Social Services through 120 local departments of social services throughout the state. The VDSS mission is “People helping people triumph over poverty, abuse, and neglect to shape strong futures for themselves, their families and communities.”

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Interviews are available upon request. For additional story ideas and information, contact Carla Harris, VDSS, (804) 726-7107 or carla.harris@dss.virginia.gov. For information on DCSE, visit <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/dcse.html>.